An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Presentation Secondary School
Warrenmount, Dublin 8
Roll number: 60792C

Date of inspection: 27 September 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>26 and 27 September 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• The teaching observed was of a good quality overall, with many instances of very effective practice.
• Classroom management was uniformly good and helped to establish high expectations of student co-operation and engagement with learning.
• Timetable provision for English is good in each of the wide range of programmes offered.
• The school has reviewed the programmes offered and the basis for class formation, and reflective practice and strategic planning are embedded in its culture.
• The subject plan gives the rationale and objectives of the English curriculum; however, year plans for class groups are written individually rather than collaboratively.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• As students progress through the school, they should be increasingly encouraged to work independently and in co-operation with each other so that they become less dependent on wholly teacher-directed instruction.
• Collaborative planning to develop programmes of work with agreed learning outcomes should be progressed.
INTRODUCTION

Presentation Secondary School Warrenmount is a long-established girls’ school located in the historic Liberties of Dublin. It participates in the Department’s DEIS initiative (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and offers five curricular programmes including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Current enrolment is 318.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Nine lessons were observed, covering all years, levels and programmes and involving almost all members of the English department. Overall, the teaching observed was of a good quality, with many instances of very effective practice.

- Teachers used a range of methods and teaching approaches, and selected materials and strategies that were appropriate to the class group and the learning outcomes planned.

- Task-based learning activities were employed effectively and included individual, pair and group work. It would be worthwhile explaining to students the reasons for the staged approach involved in the ‘think, pair, share’ method. This would help them to reflect on their own learning and to take greater ownership of it, especially in junior cycle class groups.

- To a considerable degree, students were able to work co-operatively and support each other. Further development of co-operative learning strategies would help students to be less dependent on the teacher and would build confidence in their own abilities.

- The teacher’s input often had a focus on the development of students’ skills. Where the teacher read to the class group, the aim was to facilitate students’ understanding of and response to the text. Students were engaged by this approach, which was supported by good questioning to check comprehension and to invite students to express their views.

- In extending the good questioning strategies observed, teachers should introduce appropriately challenging questions when directing whole-class discussions with all class groups. Questions that require students to gather implied meanings and to express and support their personal responses are especially valuable. Some very good practice in this area was noted, particularly in the senior cycle.

- Good attention was paid to the development of students’ writing skills. Frequent short writing tasks were set in the lessons observed, and writing assignments were helpfully grounded in texts that students were reading, thus integrating the development of comprehending and composing skills. To this end, the use of creative modelling and of very structured writing frames is commended and is a teaching approach that teachers could work on collaboratively to develop a bank of templates and models.

- An appropriate emphasis was placed on the development of speaking skills, not only through participation in discussion but also in a more structured way through drama and debate.

- A good level of formative assessment was noted, both in global feedback to class groups that was clear and informative, and in helpful written comments on students’ work. A targeted approach to addressing errors in accuracy and structure was noted in many instances, and should be further developed and implemented.
• Classroom management was uniformly good. Teachers successfully maintained a balance between a supportive rapport with students and an appropriate degree of challenge. Students were generally engaged and co-operative, and appeared to enjoy the subject.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

• English is very well provided for in all programmes both in the number and distribution of lessons.

• At present, there is a discrete JCSP class group in each year of the junior cycle. Students within these class groups are encouraged to enter the TY programme and to proceed to the established Leaving Certificate, where appropriate. The present review of JCSP should strengthen the delivery of the programme as a support framework for target students of all abilities.

• The trend in the school is increasingly towards the teaching of English in mixed-ability class groups in junior cycle, with the intention of creating a stimulating and supportive learning environment for students of all abilities, and increasing uptake of higher level English. In line with this, decisions on examination level are being deferred as a means of increasing students’ confidence and expectations. This is a positive development.

• The school participates in the JCSP Demonstration Library Project. School management has facilitated a co-ordinated approach to the use of this excellent resource involving key teachers and the librarian.

• Very good information and communication technology (ICT) resources are available, and the school has good links with the locally-based Digital Hub to support the use of ICT in teaching and learning.

• The English team of seven teachers is relatively large. While school management is deploying the teaching resource effectively, the pattern of deployment should as far as possible ensure that the main teachers of English have regular class contact with a wide range of years, levels and programmes.

• The school supports teachers’ continuing professional development and teachers are involved in the subject association and other in-service opportunities.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

• The English subject plan corresponds to the permanent section of the school plan, in that it states the rationale underpinning the curriculum; the aims and objectives; policies and procedures in key areas; and supports for students.

• Individual planning is very thorough. In a number of instances, teachers have used a columnar layout to reflect the linking of topics, materials, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and modes of assessment.

• The individual schemes of work generally deliver the objective of the various syllabuses: to expose students to a wide and stimulating selection of texts. Text choices for all years and programmes should be discussed so that collective wisdom is shared, and there is agreement that the choices made will assist students to develop their skills and attain their potential.
• To build on the good planning work done collectively and individually, work should now focus on the collaborative development of shared and agreed plans for each year and group. Planned learning outcomes are best expressed as statements of what students must, should and could know and be able to do. This form of planning builds on the very useful approach taken in the JCSP target statements. It supports appropriate differentiation and promotes the increasing involvement of students in reflecting on and taking responsibility for their learning and their progress through the curriculum. The statements should be expressed as clear and measurable outcomes and should be discussed, agreed and implemented consistently.

• Good practices to track and record students’ progress are in place.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the inspection; a response was not received from the board.

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